

Just one thing is needed?

An American inventor created a safety bed which he claims will protect him against hurricanes, tornadoes, thieves, kidnappers and terrorists. The inventor's website calls it, "The Safest Rest You've Ever Had".

When a motion sensor detects a threat, the "Quantum Sleeper" automatically folds up around its occupant. Inside the bullet-proof canopy, an alarm awakens the alerted sleeper, who can spray tear gas on the intruder – or watch a movie on the DVD player while waiting out a storm.

Even so, I suspect that not even an armoured bed can guarantee a good night's sleep untouched by anxiety or fear.

Jesus said to Martha, "*Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things!*"

Jesus could see into her heart and it was a picture of restlessness.

The Prince of Peace, Jesus, then contrasts Martha's anxiety with the peace that Mary found sitting and listening to the words of Jesus.

He said to Martha, "*Only one thing is needed and Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*"

This is not a story about who Jesus loved best, for Jesus loved both of them equally. This is a story that was recorded for us, so that we would find peace in our troubled world.

We are living in a troubled world and many things are distracting us from our faith. We only have to turn on the news and there are many distractions that add to our anxiety.

Even in our national and local church situations, with the reduction in ministries, finances and buildings that are affecting us all, it is easy to become distracted from the main thing. It is easy for us to focus on the distractions rather than coming to focus on our reason for being.

But this is not a new human problem and it is as old as the first person to have lived. Thousands of years ago, the psalmist wrote, "*Answer me when I call out to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer*" and if we take time to read the psalms, we will discover many times, the psalmists are anxious and troubled and distracted.

But in Psalm 4, the psalmist finds peace when he turns to God.

He writes, *“When you are on your bed, search your heart and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and trust the Lord”* and he finishes with *“I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”*

Jesus commends Mary, because she has found that place of peace. She has discovered the answer to her problems and indeed the problems of life. She has found her inner peace, whereas her flapping sister was trying to find peace through all her activities.

What did Jesus want that day from the sisters?

Did he want a three course meal?

Did he want to be treated like some special guest?

I think he simply wanted them both to be at peace, and find their peace in his love and care.

Now, nobody could fault Martha, in the sense that she wanted to provide the very best for Jesus. She wanted to go the extra mile. This little gem of a story of the two sisters, comes directly after the story of the Good Samaritan, and it comes after Jesus's words to the crowds, *“Go and do likewise”*, be a Good Samaritan, and Martha was attempting to be a good Samaritan, by helping her neighbour, who at this time happens to be Jesus. Let's be honest, if Jesus, was to visit our homes, would we not push the boat out and present to him the very best we could offer.

So, I don't think that Jesus was criticising Martha for her work ethic. But what he was challenging her on, was her priorities. This was the moment that she needed to come and sit at his feet. This was the moment that he was to share himself with them, literally feed them with his words, but because Martha was too busy, she misses the best of Jesus.

Another thing that Martha did, that I'm sure would have sat uncomfortably with Jesus, was that she created a tension in the room. She turned the situation into a conflict. Notice how quickly the atmosphere changes in the room.

She challenges Jesus and asks him the direct question; *do you not care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!*

Words can change the atmosphere in a room – thoughtless words, and we are all probably guilty of this. Words that are meant to hurt and to divide. I can feel the anger in her words when she says to Jesus, *“Tell her to help me!”*

These are frustrated words, she wants her way; but who is Martha to command Jesus, to tell her sister?

In the Epistle of James. James writes about wrong motives and anger...

4¹⁻³ But about the feuds and struggles that exist among you—where do you suppose they come from? Can't you see that they arise from conflicting passions within yourselves? You crave for something and don't get it, you are jealous and envious of what others have got and you don't possess it yourselves. Consequently, in your exasperated frustration you struggle and fight with one another. You don't get what you want because you don't ask God for it. And when you do ask, he doesn't give it to you, for you ask in quite the wrong spirit—you only want to satisfy your own desires.

James gets to the root of one of our deepest human problems – a smothering absorption with our own desires – getting our own way and having our own needs met. When that passion is frustrated, it can quickly become blind rage that demeans others and debases us. Though we may get what we want, we're left feeling unsatisfied.

Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of detail to the story of the two sisters and Jesus. We don't know what happens next? Did Martha finish preparing the meal? Was she offended by Jesus? Was her ego hurt? How did Mary feel? Did Mary rush to the kitchen or did she continue listening to Jesus?

Martha was to learn a lesson that day, a lesson that would stay with her all her life. I'm sure that after Jesus' death, there would be many days that she would have wanted to sit at his feet and be in his presence.

But then that would be too late.

In our reading from Colossians, the Apostle Paul speaks of his knowledge of Jesus. He begins with these remarkable words, he is the image of the invisible God, the first born all over all creation...Now we see why the encounter with Jesus was so important in Martha's house. She had welcomed into her home, not just a visiting preacher or a famous person, she had welcomed into her home, God. But she didn't realise it, at the time.

This is a lovely story with deep truths.

It is a story that encourages us to welcome into our homes and our hearts, the one who is the image of the invisible God, for when we do we will find our peace.

I'm conducting a funeral service on Thursday. Not for a member of Cadder but a member of Springburn. It was someone I knew from earlier days and the

minister at Springburn not been too well, I was approached to conduct the service.

The elderly lady who died was a woman of faith, a woman who was brought up in the church. I visited her family on Friday morning, her great nephews were there and had been close to her throughout their lives, and one of them said, "Aunty had no fear of dying", she said, "she was prepared." Isn't that lovely, she had found her peace in the love and mercy of God. She had no fear. That's what faith in Jesus brings to us all.

It brings a deep peace, a peace that Martha did not have at that point.

It is interesting that after Lazarus died and Jesus arrived, it was Martha who was first out to meet him and she said to him, "If you had been here my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask. Jesus answered her, your brother will rise again. ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

This is a different sounding Martha from the one who is anxious and troubled. This was now the Martha who had found her peace through Jesus.

Let me finish with one last thought.

In a cemetery not far from New York City is a gravestone engraved with a single word *forgiven*. The message is simple and unembellished. There is no date of birth, no date of death, no epitaph. There is only a name and the solitary word *forgiven*. But that is the greatest word that could be ever applied to any man or woman, or that could be written on any gravestone.

In our reading in Colossians, Paul writes, "For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in Jesus and through Jesus to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in Heaven, by making peace, through his blood shed on the cross."

Here is our ultimate peace, that through Jesus we are reconciled with God.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen